

running head: Aging in Anderson's Films

“That's not enough”: Aging in Wes Anderson's Moonrise Kingdom and Rushmore

Rachael McLennan

Keywords: adolescence, experience, gender, limits, rite of passage, ritual, teen film

Abstract: This article argues that while Anderson's films are often characterized as concerned with youth, this is inaccurate. Interactions between adults and young people are key. Focusing on Moonrise Kingdom (2012) and Rushmore (1998), it explores how a young man's coming of age prompts a crisis of maturity for male adults. It also considers ageing in Anderson's oeuvre more widely, contending that Anderson's explorations of ageing are ultimately conservative, prioritizing male experience and adulthood.

Wes Anderson's Moonrise Kingdom (2012) focuses on the romance between twelve-year-olds Sam Shakusky (Jared Gilman) and Suzy Bishop (Kara Hayward), who run away twice from their homes in the island of New Penzance in 1965, their second attempt coinciding with a major September storm. Following the recovery of Sam and Suzy after their first escape, Suzy's parents have a rare personal exchange as they lie in their separate beds, listening to the approaching storm (they are unaware that their daughter has run away for the second time). The conversation begins with their mutual inquiries into the progress of legal cases they are working on. Side-on close-ups focus on each individual (as if from the gap between the beds) as he or she asks about their spouse's case and responds to the answer, suggesting that they are going through the motions of making polite inquiries, rather than truly caring about each other's lives. Laura (Frances McDormand) then apologizes to Walt (Bill Murray) for hurting him, and now their faces are shown via overhead close shots, which Sunhee Lee identifies as Anderson's favored means of filming “the decisive moment” in emotional scenes, partly as a strategy to create spectators' empathy (433, 438). Indeed, Lee uses this scene as her example of “the moment of accepting the truth” in Moonrise Kingdom (436). The overhead shots have the effect of making Walt and Laura seem small, vulnerable, and estranged (they do not look at each other while they

speaking but stare at the ceiling). Walt's relatively forgiving response (he claims that "half of those injuries were self-inflicted") suggests that he feels responsibility for the strains in their relationship is shared. But then he declares, "I hope the roof flies off and I get sucked up into space. You'll be better off without me." Laura remonstrates, "Stop feeling sorry for yourself." When he asks why, she replies in a broken voice, "We're all they've got, Walt." While Walt's full face is visible, since he is still filmed from overhead, Laura is now filmed close up and from the side again, so only the right-hand side of her face is visible. After a long pause, during which Walt turns to his wife and frowningly studies her for the first time in the conversation, he says, "That's not enough." Laura has turned to him during the pause. She nods, then turns her face from him. Walt's final utterance, "That's not enough," is not filmed from overhead but resumes the close-up. His rebellious attitude is therefore contrasted with the reality of his perceived entrapment, suggesting too that his wife's perspective and the values it represents, not his, are dominant.

Walt's "That's not enough" is ambiguous. It is the contention of this article that difficulties in interpreting this line illuminate some of the central preoccupations and tensions of Anderson's work, as well as some of his films' problematic elements, particularly as they relate to what Cynthia Felando describes as Anderson's "signature attention to age-related themes" (69). "That's not enough" may suggest that Walt is unmoved by his wife's insistence that he refrain from self-pity; parental responsibility and the claims of others are not sufficient to ground him securely or happily in life, even as the implicit question—what would be enough—is unanswered. It also, however, suggests that he believes he and his wife are not "enough" for their children; again, though, an implicit question is raised and goes unanswered (what would be enough for the children). Even here, though, there is some ambiguity about which children are being discussed. Despite Laura's "they," surely she and her husband are exclusively discussing Suzy, who is embarking on what appears to be a troubled adolescence, as her brothers are given little attention in the film. Her "they" is unlikely to refer to Sam and Suzy, as Laura and Walt have been keen to separate the two, and show little concern for Sam. It is not impossible that she is making a general point: "we" (adults) are all "they" (children) have. Perhaps Walt does not know what is "enough" for himself or his daughter; if he does know what is enough, he does not say what it is. "Enough" seems to mark, for Walt, both the minimum requirement for a satisfying existence (enough in the sense of "sufficient") but also a maximum, or outer limit (what is most

fulfilling for his existence). Whatever he means, Laura does not interpret his attitude favorably; her nod does not signify agreement but registers something like finality, her sense that their views are incompatible and perhaps she has had “enough”; the marriage is over.

Since these unanswered questions are simultaneously made available for consideration as a result of Walt’s enigmatic remark, the film’s primary focus is rendered unclear. Is Moonrise Kingdom mainly concerned with what is “enough” for children—that is to say, with Sam and Suzy and what is necessary to keep them safe and happy? Or is the film also concerned with what is enough for Walt, who may be suffering a midlife crisis? He certainly seems depressed, and expresses a wish to escape his marriage and family. Or—more likely—are these questions inseparable, and there is a connection between the stories of Sam, Suzy, and Walt? Walt’s remarks are uttered on the same day that Sam and Suzy wake, on their first morning on the island, only to find a search party outside their tent. Walt is first to approach them, running forward and shouting “No!” after Sam frantically rezips the tent opening in a bid to protect himself and Suzy. Walt furiously lifts the tent and holds it over their heads for several long seconds, in a manner which is initially threatening (emphasizing the vulnerability of Sam and Suzy and his own power) but then merely absurd, as if Walt does not know what to do next. He then casts the tent aside, to his right, and walks away to his left, suggesting exhaustion or defeat. This gesture of holding the tent above Sam and Suzy’s heads prefigures and may even inspire Walt’s fantasy of a roof blown off. In his anger with Suzy and Sam, Walt takes on the role of the storm in his fantasy, the external agency that rips the roof (and in the case of the tent, the whole house) from over Sam and Suzy’s heads. However, this act does not facilitate escape, as it does in Walt’s fantasy. Walt’s gesture signals the end of their time together and their return to their community. His dejected walk away, though, may indicate that his fight has gone, and his later remarks certainly suggest that some part of him shares their desire to escape (Sam and Suzy may not desire to be sucked up into space as Walt does, but they do desire to take leave of everything they know).

These indeterminacies can stand as representative of a dilemma that frequently preoccupies critics of Anderson’s work. It is a critical commonplace to observe that his films are preoccupied with the experiences of coming of age, aging, and the relationships between youthful and adult characters. But it is considerably more challenging to develop a coherent thesis about why, and for what purpose, Anderson’s work explores these themes. Mark

Browning, for example, argues that “Anderson specializes in blurring the boundaries between adult and child, especially dramatizing childlike adults” (30). This reading might be understood as illustrating what Peter C. Kunze calls the “glib assessment of many reviewers and film scholars that children and adults swap places in Anderson’s films” (95). While Kunze is correct to complicate such readings, his extensive consideration of the ways in which critics have described Anderson’s depictions of aging and his detailed exploration of the influence of children’s literature in Anderson’s work nonetheless contains two problematic contentions.

Firstly, Kunze claims that “in the worlds of Wes Anderson, no one ever matures—not because it is difficult to do so, but because it implies an artificial sense of progress, as if childhood and adulthood are wholly distinctive periods of human existence” (102). He further claims that Anderson “dissolves any implied social separation between childhood and adulthood, refusing to see either as advantageous, to demonstrate that such delineations are inherently superficial and impractical” (103). (This final point is really rather similar to Browning’s.)

This article disputes every aspect of these claims. It reads Rushmore (1998) alongside Moonrise Kingdom to argue that Anderson’s treatment of “age-related themes” is both more complex and less consistent than critics suggest (Felando 69). These films have been chosen for discussion because they both can be understood as exploring this question of “what is enough” with their attendant ambiguities. Both focus on a young man’s coming of age that has consequences for the adults around him, and they mark an early and a more recent work by Anderson. I argue that Anderson’s films are concerned to identify the work of determining, first, what is “enough” for a fulfilling or happy existence, and then, with realizing that existence. They do depict this work as central to coming of age (crucially, this is specifically for young white protagonists). But Anderson’s films also explore the ramifications of these coming of age experiences for others, as the opening discussion of Walt Bishop shows.

These explorations of the impact of coming of age on others takes two main forms. First and most obviously, these films suggest that witnessing a young man’s coming of age often prompts a crisis for older adults, which takes the form of whether and how they will assist, or even be responsible for, the younger man (again, these older adults are primarily male). Chris Robé’s contention that “fear of the other looms large in Anderson’s films” (Kunze 113) is borne out here in that the coming of age crisis, the working out of “what is enough” for a satisfying existence, is often prompted or exacerbated by hostile relationships between the young men and

adults, which could be described as a testimony to a kind of mutual othering. The crisis for these older male characters is similar, but not identical to, the coming of age crisis, because while it is generated by the same question (testing or, in the case of the older men, recalibrating what is “enough” for a fulfilling existence), the social status and power accorded to adults in the films’ respective societies influences how the crisis is resolved, a resolution that has ramifications for reading both the older and younger men as “mature.” Resolution of the crisis for both young and older male characters tends to be benign, diminishing conflict between adults and children, pitting them not against but alongside each other. Yet while this may sound positive, particularly as it could be read as erasing that mutual othering, the situation is not so simple. Significantly, and contrary to Kunze’s claims, Moonrise Kingdom and Rushmore reveal an investment in maintaining the social separations between childhood and adulthood, and they portray adulthood as more powerful. This too has consequences for any assessment of if, and how, characters mature.

Second, the manner in which these films show coming of age as a crisis for others has particular ramifications for the representation of girls and women, who have extremely limited functions in these films. They generally have a role in causing the male character’s crisis of “what is enough” although they also are the answer to the question of what is enough (as Suzy may be, for Sam, and as Miss Cross briefly is for Max). The privileging of white male experience in Anderson’s films has been well documented by critics.¹ While Felando approvingly cites Jesse Fox Mayshark’s claim that the “more fully adult characters in [Anderson’s] films tend to be women” (68), I would dispute this. Rather, Anderson’s explorations of youth and aging simply do not attend to women’s experiences. Girls and women in Anderson’s films are usually portrayed in more static terms. While acquisition of a relatively stable identity may be one feature attributed to adulthood, their maturity also tends to remain relatively unchanged; they are simply less likely to develop, to generate narrative or influence plot (Gwyneth Paltrow’s Margot in The Royal Tenenbaums [2001] may be an important exception here).² They are less frequently portrayed as having crises of their own, and, if they are (as in the case of Suzy, which will be discussed later), little concern is given to the cause of the crisis or its resolution. Casting (and fear of) women as “other” remains consistent in Anderson’s films.

Considering the films as described above potentially offers a reframing of discussions about aging in Anderson's work. That is to say, perhaps it is more valuable to understand Anderson's work as a series of examinations of what is "enough" for fulfilling (male, heterosexual) existence, which takes the form of depicting characters working out this problem at different stages of the life cycle. In doing so, I am making the tentative suggestion gender, rather than age, is the aspect of identity that is truly central in Anderson's work. However, it is vital to caution against making rigid categorizations or theorizations about how youth and aging function in Anderson's films. Walt Bishop, for example, provides an especially compelling example of the conundrums of aging in Anderson's work, because his crisis of "what is enough" goes unresolved.

"We can't predict the future": Sam, Max, and Adulthood

Moonrise Kingdom and Rushmore, then, focus on a central young male protagonist's coming of age, but each film finds different answers to that question of what is enough for a fulfilling existence. While on their first runaway attempt, Sam asks Suzy what she wants to be when she grows up. Rather than citing a role or profession, she says, "I don't know. I want to go on lots of adventures, I think. Not get stuck in one place." Sam approves of this response and echoes her words when turning the question on himself: "Go on adventures, too. Not get stuck in one place, too." But then he appends, "Anyway, we can't predict the exact future." In Rushmore, Max Fischer (Jason Schwartzman) is a slightly older but also troubled boy (he is at risk of expulsion from the prestigious Rushmore school). Nonetheless, his confidence is such that he is addressed by multimillionaire businessman Herman Blume (Bill Murray) as if he has the answers to the problem of existence: "What's the secret, Max?" adding, "You seem to have it pretty figured out." Max responds: "I don't know. I—I think you just gotta find something you love to do, and then . . . do it for the rest of your life. For me, it's going to Rushmore." Max's hesitations (the ellipsis and stuttered "I") indicate that he may feel pressured by the weight of expectation Blume places on him and hint that he is not as confident as Blume assumes. Both Sam and Max are more similar than they appear—their responses both contain the suggestion (via Sam's qualifying "we can't predict" and Max's hesitancy) that the answers they give are not final and may be insufficient. And indeed, they are forced to modify their attitudes, which describe their

relationships to time and identity. Sam initially appears to believe in and embrace the endless possibilities of change, but this belief in uncertainty has a more sinister side. It makes him reluctant to forge relationships (especially with adults) in the present, and envision the future, until he eventually learns that it is possible to make lasting commitments. After all, the line “we can’t predict the future” could be read as alluding to a repressed desire to do the opposite of what he has just said; really, Sam wants to get stuck in one place. Max’s seemingly complacent faith in the fixedness of his own identity, expressed in terms of certainty about his future, is shown to be delusional. This is evidenced by the impossibility of his desire—to go to Rushmore for the rest of his life is to deny the passing of time and cultural imperatives to become adult and achieve maturity (of course, Max conducts himself as if he has achieved maturity and adult status). Some time after his exchange with Blume, Max expresses an attitude identical to Sam’s. He too says, “We can’t predict the future,” but unlike Sam’s declaration, this is insincere. Max makes his declaration to his love interest Miss Cross (Olivia Williams), a teacher at Rushmore. His remark is designed to prompt her to imagine that he could be something other than her student, but while this requires her to conceive of the future as containing unexpected possibilities, he is fully intent on realizing one future, in which he and Miss Cross are together.) When both Max and Sam make this statement, though, they show a willingness to test the limits of their worldviews.

Sam and Max face the task of working out “what is enough” when they are on the cusp of, or in the midst of, adolescence. The answers they arrive at will presumably determine the kind of adult they will become in the future; this is why the work of finding those answers can be understood as comprising their experiences of coming of age.³ Despite their significant differences in temperament (Sam is largely sincere in his dealings with others, Max more disposed to intrigue; in fact, Deborah J. Thomas describes Max’s lack of adherence to social rules as “almost sociopathic” [106]), their work of determining what is “enough” can be usefully considered in relation to a number of claims in Catherine Driscoll’s study of teen film. This is not to argue that either of these films is a “teen film” in any conventional sense, although both films conceivably meet the three “claims about representation” Driscoll describes as being dominant in critical work on teen film: “that it is American, that it represents teenage life and concerns, and that it fails to represent teenagers accurately” (5). It should be noted, as perhaps Driscoll does not sufficiently do so, that these last two claims are potentially contradictory,

illustrating how challenging it is for critics to define this genre, and how difficult it is to determine what teenage or adolescence experience looks like. Additionally noting the assumption that teen films are produced for adolescent audiences (3), a criterion that would exclude Anderson's films, Driscoll attempts to move beyond all of these claims in favor of a more searching and amorphous definition of teen film, noting that it is "a genre that is preoccupied with the difficulty as well as the importance of borders" (2).⁴ This claim risks making the concept of "teen film" so capacious that any film dealing with young people could theoretically belong to it, even as it makes it valid to consider both Moonrise Kingdom and Rushmore in relation to it. It could be argued that it is their focus on the development of young men that enables Anderson's films to be read alongside Driscoll's definition of "teen film," while their underlying prioritization of adulthood (as more highly valued identity, as included in the film's targeted audience) in Anderson's films accounts for their divergence from the definition.

For the purposes of this article, it is important to focus on Driscoll's claim that the "transnational story about modern adolescence centered on difficulty: adolescence was a struggle for independence and a site of vulnerability; a moment of crisis in which new desires clashed with a new awareness of limits and possibilities" (11). Kunze's implicit claim that maturation is not "difficult" in Anderson's work is very wide of the mark; maturation is difficult for Anderson's male characters, and so is assessing how and if it has taken place. To say that Sam and Max must negotiate between their desires and the limits their (adult) worlds place on those desires is to say nothing very unconventional about adolescence, and is mainly notable for how it shows that these films do reflect the "transnational story" of adolescence. Rather, I argue that the "moment of crisis" that Driscoll says defines adolescence is actually one which in Anderson's works extends to, or is experienced separately by, central male characters regardless of age. Walt's "that's not enough," suggests that he is trying to expand and test the limits of his world, and indeed that he even fantasizes that those limits are violently torn open (the roof flies off). This "difficulty" raises a substantial interpretive problem (Driscoll 2). Maybe all Anderson's central male characters, irrespective of age, should be understood as undergoing adolescence (to what extent this undermines the "transnational story" of adolescence is a difficult question). After all, Murray's desire for the roof to fly off surely denotes a desire (which could be described as childish or immature) to escape the limits of domestic life that he finds stifling. His wife's

claim that “We’re all they’ve got” constitutes an attempt to remind him of his adult status, or reinforce its limits, aligning a female character with the work of policing limits and curtailing certain male desires.

Driscoll argues that “if modern adolescence is a crisis from which the adult subject is presumed to emerge, teen film is interested in the limits and possibilities of this process.” She describes rites of passage as key to teen film:

The rite of passage operates in two ways in teen film. The first is as a ritual marking passage between two different social states, like graduation ceremonies, or indicating an immanent [sic] change of this kind, like “the prom.” And the second does not depend on any literal “rite” and might be more properly called an “experience of limits.” The former is always a cultural rather than merely personal marker, but the key difference lies in whether the rite of passage belongs to one of teen film’s principal narrative structures, “coming of age.” Some films . . . involve both, and in both the rite of passage involves separation from the banal practices of life. And for teen film in practice, I want to stress, rites of passage are often thwarted by the complexity of coming of age, when they are not entirely disappointing. (66)

While I am hesitant about claiming that Moonrise Kingdom and Rushmore belong to the genre of teen film, I do argue that they do share a number of its concerns, as defined by Driscoll. Both contain rites of passage, both in the form of the ritual and the experience of limits. Importantly though, the relationship of, and importance allocated to, ritual and experience of limits is different in each film. The ways in which Sam and Max negotiate both allows for readings of their coming of age crisis, as well as thinking through the “difficulties” of aging in Anderson’s films.

Rushmore concerns the damage done when Max obsessively pursues illusions at the expense of reality. He fantasizes about being a high-achieving, popular school student despite taking up too many extra-curricular activities and alienating his friends through various lies and deceptions. And he obsessively pursues Miss Cross, a hopeless quest that only becomes more desperate following Max’s expulsion from Rushmore—he tells her at one point that “Rushmore

was my life. Now you are.” So attached is Max to his conception of what is “enough” for a satisfying life, which might be construed as identification and pursuit of an all-consuming goal (“You gotta find something you love to do, then do it for the rest of your life. For me, it’s going to Rushmore”), that he simply substitutes Miss Cross for permanent attendance at the school as his paramount desire. Max’s pursuit of Miss Cross pits him against her rival suitor Blume, and results in her leaving her job. Eventually, though, Max recognizes the futility of his efforts and their damaging consequences, and he uses his playwriting and directorial talents to orchestrate a scenario in which his erstwhile enemies gather together as the audience for his play, the process allowing them to recognize each other as a community of friends. He additionally uses the occasion to reunite Miss Cross and Blume, allocating them adjacent seats for the performance. During the dance that follows the play, a sense of rite of passage as ritual is made visible in a brief exchange when Blume refers to Margaret Yang as Max’s “new girlfriend.” As Max echoes Blume’s words in an embarrassed tone of demurral, she enthusiastically insists, “Yes, I am,” and Max does not challenge her. The film concludes by revealing that Max has encountered one of the “rituals” of heterosexual coming of age (acquiring a girlfriend) while simultaneously incorporating Max within an age-appropriate relationship.⁵ While this undoubtedly prioritizes adulthood (because adulthood is a goal of coming-of-age; because Max is simultaneously, paradoxically, read as not-yet adult at the film’s conclusion; and because normative [adult-defined] definitions of coming-of-age are enforced in this ritual), Max also has a positive “experience of limits”—the successful performances he has orchestrated on and offstage show his creative power and abilities to effect change and influence others. The film does not dispute Max’s conception of what is appropriate for a fulfilling life (“You gotta find something you love...”); it merely suggests that Max was wrong to make Rushmore and Miss Cross the object of his desire, and perhaps his dramatic talents should take their place. The rite of passage as an experience of limits is foregrounded, seemingly triumphantly so, in the conclusion to Rushmore. Browning correctly argues of Max that “he is still a fifteen year old boy, the reality of which [he] only really accepts at the end of the film” (22), but despite (or even because of) this, Max’s increased self-knowledge and greater consideration for others surely means that he constitutes an example of a character in Anderson’s work who does mature, contrary to Kunze’s claim.

Moonrise Kingdom contains a single instance of rite of passage that comprises aspects of both ritual and experience of limits. On their second escape, Sam and Suzy are married by a scout master, Cousin Ben (a much older Jason Schwartzman), who tells them that

I can't offer you a legally binding union. It won't hold up in the state, the county, or frankly, any courtroom in the world, due to your age, lack of a license, and failure to get parental consent. But the ritual does carry a very important moral weight within yourselves.

J. M. Tyree calls this ceremony “a high point of absurdity,” but this is to dismiss its significance (25). The marriage ceremony Cousin Ben conducts cannot properly be considered a ritual since it does not result in a change of status—it does not result in Sam and Suzy becoming husband and wife. However, a wedding ceremony takes place, so the event aspires to the status of ritual. Ben's recognition that Sam and Suzy want the union to “hold up” is evocative of Walt's bearing the tent aloft. Sam and Suzy (particularly Sam) want the wedding to provide them with the protection and enclosure offered to them by their yellow tent, and they are searching for something that can be less easily ripped away from them by others. The ceremony's ambiguous status as rite of passage reveals the tension between cultural and personal power that this film explores, particularly in relation to Sam's ambivalence about the definition and meaning of rites of passage, coming of age, and maturity. The wedding ceremony is prompted by Sam's decision to introduce Suzy to Ben as “my wife” despite the fact they are unmarried, signaling both haste to enter adulthood (paradoxically, this may also only underscore his immaturity) and a refusal to accept conventions of coming of age as his society constructs them. Calling Suzy “my wife” in the absence of a legal ceremony prioritizes personal significance (“moral weight”) over cultural definitions. It also shows that Sam's relationship with Suzy is the one significant, extreme exception to his worldview. He may be wary of forging relationships with others, but not with Suzy; indeed, by committing to the “wedding” he reveals his desire to belong to a family.

Despite this more complex instance of rite of passage, Sam and Suzy's encounter with rite of passage as “experience of limits” is much more ambivalent than Max's. Sam is an orphan who struggles to make friends with others, and is rejected by his foster parents. Suzy has problems with anger, directed mainly toward her parents and that finds its primary cause in her

mother's affair with local police officer Captain Sharp (Bruce Willis), meaning that she has a tendency to lash out in violence. Their journeys take them to a liminal space, the tidal inlet that they call "our land," where, alone and away from adults, they can test the limits of various markers of maturity (independence, sexual experience). However, the island is only a liminal space, and they cannot stay there. Sam and Suzy ultimately experience the imposition of externally imposed limits. Members of their community, namely adults who assume various guardianship roles (parents, scout masters, social services) ensure that their journey comes to an abrupt end. This is not entirely negative, as Captain Sharp gains approval to be Sam's foster parent. This arrangement prevents Sam and Suzy from jumping off the church roof, an act that Sam acknowledges could be considered suicidal. There is also evidence that Sharp will be a good guardian. He cares for Sam's welfare, talks to him with respect, even as if he is an equal, and refuses to surrender him to the cold and corrective care of Social Services. The film's final scenes show Sam and Suzy (re)installed within families; Suzy is back in her family home, and Sam is collected from her house by Captain Sharp. Ultimately, though, it is the adults' enforcement of normative narratives of coming of age that matters, and takes precedence over Sam and Suzy's power to create a world for themselves. Contrary to Rushmore, which focuses on Max's desires and conception of "what is enough," this film prioritizes how the question of "what is enough" for Sam might be answered from the perspective of a well-intentioned adult community. That community in effect endorses Laura Bishop's claim that "We're all they've got," and acknowledges responsibility toward Sam and Suzy. The film consistently, if ambivalently, emphasizes the professions of adults, and thus their roles in the community. These roles are often caregiving (Captain, Scoutmaster). This emphasis has negative qualities, too though—Suzy's parents' emotional distance is apparent in their addressing each other as "Counsellor," which also implies that their focus on their jobs exceeds the attention they give to their children. A similar warning note is conveyed by giving Tilda Swinton's character no name at all; she is addressed in terms of the institution she represents (Social Services).

Sam's final painting of the location where he and Suzy spent time alone, the tidal inlet they have named Moonrise Kingdom, suggests that their adventures are now consigned to nostalgia or fantasy, contained by the community just as the picture is contained within its frame, within the Bishops' home. The community's successful containment of Sam and Suzy is emblemized by the cap emblazoned with the sign "Island Police" Sam wears in the final scene

(rendering him a mini-version of Sharp), and the fact that he is finally driven away in Sharp's police car (this action is surely reminiscent of the final scenes of Rebel Without a Cause (1955), which explored concerns in the 1950s about juvenile delinquency, and also concludes by suggesting its central [white] characters will conform to normative patterns of development). The film's narrator (Bob Balaban) describes the consequences of the storm: "the coastal areas of New Penzance were battered and changed forever," yet "harvest yields the following autumn far exceeded any previously recorded." The storm results in the bounds of Sam and Suzy's home being rewritten, experienced as both loss and gain (a tidal inlet is erased, the harvest is extraordinary). The narrator's summary describes how the storm impacts the community generally, hinting that Sam and Suzy's runaway attempts are to be understood as more significant for their community than for themselves. It can be argued, then, that while Max achieves some markers of coming of age (a girlfriend, a sense of identity and purpose in the world), for Sam this is postponed, although he does gain maturity (he learns to stay in one place). While Rushmore prioritizes an individual, Max, and his desires, roughly endorsing his goals, Moonrise Kingdom prioritizes community and grants Sam's own articulation of his desires less importance.

It is worth noting that both Sam and Max's coming of age crises achieve resolution via a spectacle orchestrated by young people but witnessed by adults (Max's play, and Sam and Suzy's aborted attempt to jump from a church tower during the storm). The foregrounding of community in both scenes (performing the function of audience, but also as implicated in the events witnessed) supports Steven Rybin's claim that "In Anderson's cinema, the formation of family is thus an aesthetic event, a stylish coming-together" (Kunze 40). Devin Orgeron reads such occasions as illustrating contradictions in Anderson's conception of authorship, staging tensions between the model of the single auteur and a more collaborative vision of creation. Implicit in Orgeron's work is a sense that collaborative authorship is at once more new and more "mature" than the "antiquated" notion of the single visionary author (42). That Sam paints, alone, at the end of Moonrise Kingdom, while Max's theatrical work is (perhaps only theoretically, given Max's propensity to issue orders) more reliant on a collaborative model, might correspond to the fact that Max has gone on a greater journey of self-development than Sam, and is (arguably) more mature. It also, however, reveals that Sam is (arguably) more imaginative and introspective than Max, and belongs to a community that is less strongly knit,

and less supportive. It is even unclear whether his presence in the Bishop household in the film's final moments is witnessed, let alone tolerated. Sam appears to interpret the Bishops' call to dinner as a signal to leave, exiting via a window, ambiguously suggesting either that he is there without their knowledge, or simply not expected to attend dinner). This only underscores his ambivalent status (how mature is he? Is his relationship with Suzy accepted by her parents?). That Anderson does not present either communities, collaborative authorship, or adulthood, as innately or consistently "better," throughout his work underscores, once more, the dangers of making rigid formulations about attitudes to age and aging in Anderson's films, and supports the idea that he is instead engaged in exploring the same problem (what is enough for a satisfying existence?) in relation to male characters at different ages and in different situations across his films.

Witnessing Limits: Anderson's Adults

Both Moonrise Kingdom and Rushmore test Driscoll's hypothesis that "if modern adolescence is a crisis from which the adult subject is presumed to emerge, teen film is interested in the limits and possibilities of this process" in fascinating ways. Moonrise Kingdom, for example, suggests that the adult subject who emerges from Sam's crisis is not adult Sam, but Captain Sharp, who becomes his guardian. The idea that he is "all [Sam's] got" has more power to compel Sharp's actions than it has over Walt. A similar argument could be made about Scoutmaster Ward (Edward Norton), who initially does not excel in his role. He is stripped of his badge for losing his entire troop in the storm, but instead of accepting this failure, assumes leadership more authoritatively than before and rescues the troop. And the adult subject who emerges from Max Fischer's difficult adolescence is arguably not Max, but Blume. Blume appears to be depressed and his marriage is failing, anticipating his role in Moonrise Kingdom and the mid-life crisis figures whom Murray has been notable for depicting since the 1990s.⁶ He appears to have an affinity with Max, often responding to his outlandish schemes and remarks with smiles that are knowing but sympathetic, amused but not mocking. Max may initially treat Blume as a mentor figure, as might be expected given his age and the fact that he is first introduced to Max in the role of giving a supposedly inspirational speech to Max and his peers, but he eventually treats Max like a love rival, exactly as Max treats him. He inadvertently treats Max as if he is an adult

peer, complicit with Max's deluded view of the world. He even uses Max's terms to describe his feelings for Miss Cross: "She's my Rushmore, Max," to which Max responds sadly "Yeah, I know. She was mine too." But Blume also responds to Max's acts of aggression with immature tit-for-tat attacks of his own (Max sets loose bees in his hotel room, and he responds by tampering with Max's bike). The performance of Max's play, like the storm, rewrites the terms and limits of his relationship with Blume, and it does so in more conventional terms. Max and Blume are allocated age-appropriate romantic relationships, and drop their rivalry (clearly illustrated by Max giving permission for Blume to dance with Margaret because he is his friend). Captain Sharp's decision to take on Sam's care may seem more admirable and selfless than any of Blume's behavior, but Blume does fund Max's theatrical production (as he has funded other more disastrous projects earlier in the film), showing that he actively supports Max in his desire to work out "what is enough" and believes that Max can realize his dreams. His actions suggest that he has matured and is willing to function more as a mentor to Max.

It is important to note that the crisis of working out "what is enough" is uncoupled from coming of age for Walt, Sharp, Ward, and Blume, who are already read as "adult" due to factors such as their age, professions, and domestic arrangements. This does not mean that the crisis does not entail rite of passage for these characters, however. Rather, rite of passage is available to them only in the sense of "experience of limits." It is tempting to suggest that Anderson's films hypothesize that it is in recognizing and meeting the demands of others that men can find both maturity and what is "enough" for a worthwhile, fulfilling existence (such a recognition places limits on sovereignty and independence but expands the possibilities for collaboration and, seemingly, happiness). This insight (which can be considered as ethical) is theoretically available to men from adolescence and beyond. Walt Bishop stands as an example (cautionary, because he is so clearly miserable) of someone who will not mature, or refuses these terms. His unhappiness does suggest that while recognizing and responding to the claims of others is not necessarily part of every central male character's story in Anderson's films (or successfully enacted), such recognition and care is valorized as one of the best models for living in Anderson's work.

Tyree observes that "parents in Anderson's movies tend to be neglectful, troubled, drifting, or dead" (24), so that Sharp, Ward, and to a lesser extent Blume, in their guardianship roles, provide positive counterexamples to this trend. It might also be considered positive that

Anderson's films show men finding fulfilment in the more conventionally feminized areas of relationships and caregiving. However, one of the most troubling elements of Anderson's work is the manner in which it sets limits of its own, attending almost entirely to the experiences of men, who find satisfaction in their relationships with other men (this is "enough" for their explorations). In Moonrise Kingdom this is most obviously illustrated by the film's lack of interest in exploring Suzy's troubles. The central crisis that prompts the adults in Sam and Suzy's community into action, and showcases the best qualities of Captain Sharp and Scoutmaster Ward, is the problem of Sam and who will look after him. Removing the threat that Sam may need to be placed in an orphanage means he and Suzy have no reason to jump from the roof of the church, or continue their flight, so that Suzy's behavior and even survival are predicated on his fate. While Sam's situation is improved by the film's conclusion, there is no exploration of how and if she and her parents might repair their relationship. When Social Services (Swinton) mistakenly attributes the stabbing of a boy scout with scissors to Sam (this is what prompts her to suggest that electroshock therapy may be necessary for him), Ward and Sharp cry, outraged, that it was "the girl!" who did that. Social Services says, "Well, maybe she needs help too, but that's not our job." But if Suzy does not fall under Social Services' care, it seems that nobody is truly concerned about how to help her. Walt appears to view Suzy's troubles in terms of how they relate to his own dissatisfaction and as a challenge to his authority, notwithstanding that her flashes of temper are much like his own. While Sharp talks to Sam in a "man-to-man" style after their first runaway attempt, offering him beer, Laura scrubs Suzy clean in the bath, tells her unhelpfully, "We women are more emotional," and asks Suzy why things are so hard for her. She appears to cultivate a willful blindness to the causes of Suzy's unhappiness, in order to avoid admitting any responsibility for it. It is true that Suzy's mother does end her affair, explaining that she has to "do what's better. For everybody," but there is no evidence that she treats her daughter with any more sympathy, or indeed much differently, after their rescue from the church roof. Laura's prioritizing of her family does show that she takes her own claim, "We're all they've got," seriously, to the extent she remains in an unhappy relationship. But again, there is little evidence to suggest that this is better for anyone. The domestic details of Suzy's life appear largely unchanged. In the final scene Laura calls the children to dinner, while her father is heard making threats ("Don't make us ask twice!"), which indicate that he is still angry, still authoritative. The only small sign of optimism is that, while Suzy's parents are heard rather than

seen, the suggestion that they are preparing for dinner together might mark an important shift from Todd Giles's observation, in his careful analysis of the film's opening scenes, that Walt and Laura are never seen in the same room (48). The fact that Suzy's crisis goes unexplored emphasizes how conceptions of rite of passage and coming-of-age have historically been founded on, and reflect, white male experience. While the film's representation of Suzy's existence as problem may expose this gendered structure, it does not offer any alternative modes of conceiving coming-of-age and rite of passage in relation to female experience, and it endorses, by perpetuating, conventional narratives of adolescence and development by focusing on male experience.

Moonrise Kingdom (and to a lesser extent, Rushmore) appear to suggest that for adult male characters, acknowledging and being responsible for others is a sign not only of maturity but of goodness. Disturbingly, though, solving the problem of "what is enough" for adult characters to live contentedly or well thwarts or defers the rites of passage and coming-of-age of younger characters like Sam, Suzy, and Max (indeed, Sam and Suzy appear to want exactly the kind of responsibilities that Walt experiences as suffocating, and are arguably more "adult" in their commitment to each other than he is in his marriage). The solution to adult crises necessitates returning younger characters to the "banal practices of everyday life" and to what is construed as the more powerless and dependent status of adolescence, setting limits on their capacities to rebel or to trouble their communities' attitudes toward youth and adulthood. Another way to put this, perhaps, is that if adults and children swap places in Anderson's films, then they tend to have swapped back, reasserting the status quo, by the films' conclusions.

Coming of age may be inevitable for Anderson's male characters (if, like Sam and Max, they are not yet read as adult, it is foreseeable that they will be, in time) but maturity is not a given. Walt Bishop may well have a moment of "accepting the truth" when he expresses his sense of an inadequate existence in his declaration, "That's not enough," but he is unable to articulate what would make his life fulfilling, or take action to change his life (his inability to do anything other than hold the tent in the air is a fitting illustration of his paralysis). Walt and his wife merely perform rituals of caregiving, without personal weight (they carry out duties of parenthood, seemingly without meaningful relationships to their children or each other). They therefore expose the importance of sincerity as affect and ethic in Anderson's films. While sincerity may be more readily associated with youth (as Sam and Suzy, and the often-ironized

adults in Anderson's work may illustrate), it is not presented as innate to youth (or to anyone) in Anderson's films. Instead, sincerity is a marker of maturity. Max Fischer has to learn to be sincere, at the end of Rushmore, and when he does, it signals his increased self-knowledge and his abandonment of destructive illusions. It also, however, suggests that he has accommodated himself to the reality of his world, rather than altering that world. Sincerity, then, may be one answer to "what is enough" for a good or fulfilling life in Anderson's work. But the prioritization and privileging of male, white, heterosexual experience and the unquestioning acceptance of normative models of coming-of-age in these films means that their explorations are seriously circumscribed. Like Walt Bishop, Anderson's films may be able to signal dissatisfaction with(in) these limits but cannot or will not show how they might be redrawn.

University of East Anglia
Norwich, United Kingdom

NOTES

1. Felando's article provides one of the most thorough discussions of Anderson's focus on male experience, while Rachel Dean-Ruzicka's article provides a valuable discussion of their privileging of whiteness.
2. G. Stanley Hall's two-volume Adolescence—Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education (1904) is the first systematic study of adolescence, which considers adolescence as a time of identity formation and movement toward adult life.
3. See Thomas Docherty's Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilisation of American Movies (2002) for an exploration of some of the ways coming of age is represented in film.
4. Deborah J. Thomas claims that Rushmore "departs from the conventional teen-pic. Its target demographic embraces, and could even be primarily aimed at, an adult audience" (105).
5. Jerome Hamilton Buckley's study of the bildungsroman cites encounters with women as a typical feature of maturation stories (concerning, it should be noted, male heterosexual protagonists).
6. See Peberdy, 2011, for a useful discussion of Murray's performances of mid-life "angst."

WORKS CITED

- Anderson, Wes, director. Moonrise Kingdom. Universal, 2012.
- . Rushmore. Touchstone, 1998.
- Browning, Mark. Wes Anderson: Why His Movies Matter. Praeger, 2011.
- Buckley, Jerome Hamilton. Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding. Harvard UP, 1974.
- Dean-Ruzicka, Rachel. "Themes of Privilege and Whiteness in the Films of Wes Anderson." Quarterly Review of Film and Video, vol. 30, no.1, 2013, pp. 25–40.
- Docherty, Thomas. Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilisation of American Movies. Temple UP, 2002.
- Driscoll, Catherine. Teen Film: A Critical Introduction. Berg, 2011.
- Felando, Cynthia. "A Certain Age: Wes Anderson, Angelica Huston and Modern Femininity." Film and Television Studies, vol. 10, no.1, 2012, pp. 68–82.
- Giles, Todd. "The Young Person's Guide to Moonrise Kingdom: Wes Anderson's Theme and Variations of a Theme and Variations of Benjamin Britten." Popular Culture Review, vol. 26, no.2, 2015, pp.44–54.
- Kunze, Peter C. "From the Mixed-Up Films of Mr. Wesley W. Anderson: Children's Literature as Intertexts." The Films of Wes Anderson: Critical Essays on an Indiewood Icon, edited by Kunze, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Lee, Sunhee. "Wes Anderson's Ambivalent Film Style: The Relation between Mise-en-scene and Emotion." New Review of Film and Television Studies, vol. 14, no.4, 2016, pp. 409–39.
- Orgeron, Devin. "La Camera-Crayola: Authorship Comes of Age in the Cinema of Wes Anderson." Cinema Journal, vol. 46, no.2, 2007, pp. 40–65.
- Peberdy, Donna. Masculinity and Film Performance: Male Angst in Contemporary American Cinema. Palgrave, 2011.
- Perkins, Claire. American Smart Cinema. Edinburgh UP, 2012.
- Robé, Chris. "'Because I Hate Fathers, and I Never Wanted to Be One': Wes Anderson, Entitled Masculinity, and the 'Crisis' of the Patriarch." Millennial Masculinity: Men in Contemporary American Cinema, edited by Timothy Shary, Wayne State UP, 2013, pp. 101–21.

Rybin, Steven. "The Jellyfish and the Moonlight: Imagining the Family in Wes Anderson's Films." The Films of Wes Anderson: Critical Essays on an Indiewood Icon, edited by Peter C. Kunze, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 39–49.

Thomas, Deborah J. "Framing the 'Melancomie': Character, Aesthetic and Affect in Wes Anderson's Rushmore." New Review of Film and Television Studies, vol. 10, no.1, 2012, pp. 97–117.

Tyree, J. M. "Unsafe Houses: Moonrise Kingdom and Wes Anderson's Conflicted Comedies of Escape." Film Quarterly, vol. 66, pp. 23–27.